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Projections, Power, and Blindness in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

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Purple and blue, more prominent than any eye shadow, blooming around an eye that faces a drought from tears. A foot wrapped in plaster and harsh imprints on wrists and throats and one too many "Oh, I just fell"s. These instances are often the ones that pop into our minds when asked to describe an abusive relationship. While these images and words are examples of an abusive relationship – and one that no one deserves to face, for that matter – there are other indicators of abuse that get less recognition because they do not leave scars across a victim's body; they leave their marks on the brain and heart, which are invisible to an outsider looking in. However, just because this abuse is not as explicit as physical abuse, it does not mean it is less impactful. In fact, the way emotional abuse toys with the victim's mind, making her believe that everything is her fault and twisting every ounce of confidence out of her like a dishrag being held over the sink by two overly-aggressive hands, can linger much longer than any black-and-blue does.

That being said, the most dangerous and disheartening part of emotional abuse is that if it is not stopped before its cyclical nature is normalized within the relationship, the external abuse coming from the abuser takes root internally within the victim. Just as the abuser offered her insults instead of compliments and placed unwarranted blame for negative circumstances upon her shoulders, she begins to knock herself down with put-downs and guilt-trips when he is no longer in the room. This mindset leads to the abuse becoming inescapable as loss of motivation, self-esteem, and hope solidify the victim's place in the never-ending cycle of gaining even the slightest power only for it to be taken away immediately. With no control over any circumstance,

the victim often gives in to the abuser (which would be both partner and self at this point), which then erases any possibility of an escape from the toxic, detrimental relationship.

In his novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, Thomas Pynchon demonstrates this cycle with his female protagonist, Oedipa Maas. While her abuser is never clearly defined – it could be her ex-lover, Pierce Inverartity, who deems her executrix of his will; the narrator, who speaks Oedipa's mind without allowing her to speak it on her own; and it could even be Pynchon himself, as he determines the plotline of Oedipa's life – the way she is brought to power only for it to be stripped from her in addition to being deemed passive and receiving blame unnecessarily can clearly be defined as emotional abuse. This abuse is weaved throughout the novel in the form of projections, including maps/planetariums, film, and emotional projections upon people. As a result, Oedipa becomes blind (aligning with her name-sake, Oedipus Rex) to other's control of her, how that control prevents her from gaining knowledge and power, and how that control has now dominated her ways of thinking and feeling. Therefore, by using the motif of projections throughout his novel, Pynchon demonstrates Oedipa's struggle for power in a world that constantly strips it away from her and the inescapability from a cycle of emotional abuse that begins to stem inside its victim.

When executing ex-lover Pierce Inverarity's will sends Oedipa to San Narciso, there is hope that while away from the dominance of her husband, Mucho, and psychiatrist, Dr. Hilarius, she will be able to find power within herself. Upon her arrival, the city's "ordered swirl of houses and streets" remind Oedipa of a transistor radio's circuit, and this comparison provides her with an "unexpected, astonishing clarity" (14). This clarity brings her insight and strength; the narration continues, "Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to

communicate" (14). Despite the attempt to knock her down by pointing out her lack of knowledge, Oedipa still comes to the conclusion of the city trying to communicate with her, showing growth in her power. So, in the same way that a circuit serves as a map for travelling currents, guiding them to power, the circuit-like layout of San Narciso serves as a map for Oedipa, guiding her to power.

However, as if someone flipped the switch to turn off this circuit/map, Oedipa's power is shut down immediately with no trace of blame on any outer forces (including the author), just as an abuser intentionally disempowers his victim and manipulates it all to fall on her shoulders. Following Oedipa's conclusion on San Narciso's communication, the novel continues: "There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding" (14). Just by using this one sentence, any power Oedipa had is dissipated. Firstly, the phrase "could have told her" implies a communication failure; even though San Narciso is capable of communicating (it *can* tell her), for some reason, this communication is not getting through. What is the reason? This question is answered with the phrase: "if she had tried to find out." These seven words mock Oedipa with a tone that puts complete blame on her; Pynchon knows what San Narciso is trying to communicate, and it is Oedipa's lack of effort that prevented this communication from reaching her. Furthermore, this point is driven home with the sentence's final clause. If comprehension of what is going on is "just past the threshold of [Oedipa's] understanding," she is brought so close to communication and, ultimately, so close to power, since the ability to give and receive thoughts relates to one's ability to participate in society. Yet, right at the point where she would obtain that power, Oedipa is held back. While other characters are similarly toyed with in relation to knowledge – for example, Mucho gets a

clearer understanding of the world around him only after he begins taking LSD (or so he claims) – their levels of insight are not on them; only Oedipa is blamed for her lack of knowledge (and, therefore, her lack of power) (115). Even though there are other forces at play in relation to Oedipa's characterization – an omniscient narrator along with an author that chooses every word on the page with intentionality in order to guide his characters through the plot he has created for them – all responsibility is put on Oedipa, which is exactly what an abuser does in an emotionally abusive relationship. Just as an abuser would argue, it is no one else's fault that Oedipa is not trying hard enough to understand what San Narciso is trying to communicate to her. Despite the fact both the narrator and the author have more insight into everything that is going on and, in order for Oedipa to understand, those in control of her (e.g., Pynchon) need to allow her to understand, the blame is successfully projected upon Oedipa, subsequently putting her down as a subservient to the powers surrounding her.

That being said, although arriving in San Narciso is the beginning of Oedipa's quest, Oedipa's powerlessness begins with another projection upon her: that of a film spectator. Shortly after readers are introduced to her, we find Oedipa "notic[ing] the absence of an intensity [in her life], as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix" (10). As an audience member viewing a movie, there is nothing one can do to impact it; the movie is finalized, so one can only take on a passive role and watch the movie's events play out. Therefore, in comparing Oedipa to an audience member watching a movie, her passive role, both in the universe of the novel and on a meta-fiction level, is demonstrated. During her interactions with other characters, she is the receiver of actions; for example, when staring into the face of Maxwell's Demon at John Nefastis' apartment, she is waiting for both it and him to tell her whether or not she is a Sensitive, and, in her affair with Metzger, he leaves her for another

woman (85, 121). As John Nefastis (and Maxwell's Demon) and Metzger both have the final say on the situation at hand, whether it be about ability or romance, Oedipa's fate is determined by other characters, leaving her not only passive, but also powerless. This also aligns, on a bigger level, with Pierce and Pynchon, as Pierce's will and Pynchon's authorship guide Oedipa to go certain places and interact with certain characters. Because Pierce and Pynchon are the driving forces behind Oedipa's fate, Oedipa is left with little free agency (if any at all) and receives actions instead of taking action, just like a victim in an emotional abusive relationship where the abuser controls the victim's every move.

Furthermore, not only is Oedipa "watching [this] movie," but the movie is "just perceptibly out of focus." If the film is blurry, one spends the duration of the movie simply trying to figure out what is happening at the most basic level. So, because she cannot clearly see what the plan is for her (whether it be Pynchon's, Pierce's, or any other agent's in the novel), Oedipa remains trapped under the decisions made for her; she has little power being passive, but she has even less power because, while she can see that something is off – or "just perceptibly out of focus" – there is nothing she can do about it. However, there are forces that can fix it, which leads to the final portion of this analogy. "[T]he projectionist refus[ing] to fix" the blurry movie demonstrates how Oedipa is prevented from gaining power. Other characters are perfectly capable of clarifying concepts or actions for her, Pierce could have been more detailed and explanatory in the instructions left for her to execute, and Pynchon is more than able to give her more insight (since he ultimately determines her characterization), but none of this takes place because if Oedipa cannot see how she is being controlled, she cannot stand her ground when she is forced into any direction the other entities want her to take, especially that of submission to their power.

Now, it can be said that the readers are in the same seat as Oedipa – spectators at the mercy of the projectionist – since they cannot determine the plot of the novel nor, when reading the book for the first time, can they determine exactly what is going on in the plot until they reach the novel's end. Consequently, the book is "out of focus" for the readers, as is the amount of control Pynchon has over them as the novel's author. However, the readers have more freedom than Oedipa does. They can put down and pick up the book whenever they want to; while Pynchon can make the plot more thrilling and enticing so that they may not want to stop reading, that does not take away their ability to choose. Moreover, like Oedipa watching her pre-determined fate turn into reality, while they can only sit back and watch the events of the novel play out, they still have the power of interpretation. Because Oedipa is Pynchon's character, he can literally control her thoughts through manipulation, like an emotionally abusive partner in our reality; however, Pynchon cannot completely control the readers' thoughts. He can lead them to thinking a certain way or come to a certain conclusion – which is slight manipulation – but, in the end, their own personal knowledge and experiences form how we read and interpret the novel. Pynchon cannot fully manipulate them because they are too distanced from him, both intellectually and physically, unlike Oedipa, who is (literally) under his hand. Therefore, because of the readers' own free will being too distinct, distanced, and unpredictable, the projection of spectator on them does not serve to completely dismantle our power. On the other hand, this projection of Oedipa as spectator serves to place her in a passive and powerless position right from the novel's start, and because this role is determined so early on in the plot, it is almost impossible for her to escape it.

That does not mean that Oedipa is not looking to escape it, though. After a conversation with Randolph Driblette about his role as a theatre director, in which he states that he is "the projector

at the planetarium," she poses the question, "*Shall I project a world?"* (62, 64). First, the emphasis on "I" is important; up to this point, anyone but Oedipa has been in control, so in asking if she solely shall project a world, Oedipa takes control back from those who are controlling her. Additionally, her asking "Shall I?" compared to "Can I?" or "Should I?" shows an empowered way of thinking as "shall" is a much more confident verb compared to "can," which questions ability, and "should," which asks permission. Oedipa is not doubting her ability or asking permission to project a world; she is asking if she will project a world in the future. And, this future transition into power is only emphasized by the final words of Oedipa's question. Instead of using the noun "projector" as Driblette does or "projectionist" as Pynchon does, she uses the verb "project," further demonstrating her taking control over the men in her life and playing an active role in the world she will project (contrasting the "audience member" she was equated to at the novel's start). Therefore, if Oedipa projects her own world, she creates her own map and, in being both the creator and projector, she will never be lost and powerless again.

Yet, even in this moment, the climax of Oedipa's empowerment, she has to be torn down. Right after she poses the question in her journal, the narration continues, "If not project then at least flash some arrow on the dome to skitter among constellations and trace out your Dragon, Whale, Southern Cross. Anything might help" (65). This alternative to projecting demonstrates his lack of confidence in Oedipa's ability. In saying, "If not project then at least flash," Pynchon expresses not only that he does not think Oedipa is capable of projecting, but also that she is hardly capable of flashing, which is the bare minimum in his eyes (emphasized through "at least"). This deterioration of Oedipa's power continues through the use of very general words like "some arrow" or "anything," which again show that Pynchon hardly expects Oedipa to

achieve the bare minimum, along with Pynchon's choice of verbs. Compared to Oedipa's very active and powerful "project," "skitter" and "trace" are weak verbs, having to do with skimming over and outlining the surface of something (in this case, a projection) that already exists. Additionally, in suggesting that Oedipa "trace out your Dragon, Whale, Southern Cross," which are constellations that actually exist, Pynchon annihilates her idea to project "a world," a world that has the potential to be different from the one she is currently a part of or one that has already been established. Allowing Oedipa to do so gives her the power to defy the author who is constantly putting her down, which puts Pynchon's power into question. He cannot let this transfer of power happen – he cannot let his own character undermine his authorial authority – and therefore, he resorts to the emotionally abusive cycle that has already been established: the minute Oedipa shows a smidge of becoming powerful, she must be shut down, usually by invalidation.

With that being said, this can also be seen as a moment where Oedipa's own voice conflates with the narrator's. Instead of allowing her to be active in her own thought process – for example, tagging her thoughts with "she thought" so that she herself is completing the action of thinking – Pynchon writes Oedipa's thoughts within his own narration of the novel's action (called free indirect discourse). First, this aligns with Oedipa's role of being a spectator from the beginning of the book and, therefore, with the emotional abuse she is experiencing; the right to her own thoughts is being taken from her, just as an abuser manipulates and controls the thoughts of his victim. Secondly, and more profoundly, interpreting the narration in this way demonstrates the repercussions of the emotional abuse on Oedipa. Instead of Pynchon doubting her ability to project a world right after her feeling of empowerment, Oedipa is doubting her own ability and dragging herself down. When one is in an environment where she is constantly put down,

especially during the times she feels most confident, the toxic, negative language coming from the environment begins to infiltrate her thoughts because the consistency and repetition solidifies this language as truth. Consequently, she begins to believe this "truth" and repeat it to herself internally, diminishing her self-esteem; she herself becomes part of the abusive forces. So, whether this quote is read in Pynchon's voice/the narrator's voice or Oedipa's, it does not matter. These words still perpetuate the emotional abuse Oedipa is experiencing and serve to knock down her self-esteem at the pinnacle of her empowerment.

From this point forward, the readers begin to see the doubting of Oedipa (whether it is from an external force, from Oedipa herself, or both) take shape more prevalently in the novel, which comes with its own set of repercussions. During Oedipa's meeting with Genghis Cohen about some "irregularities" in Pierce's stamp collection, Pynchon writes:

> She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to–an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure. Afterward, it is only this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (76)

The fact that Oedipa is "wonder[ing]" shows her lack of confidence immediately, as wondering is not an assertive verb (notice that, when Oedipa is finally the subject of a sentence associated with action, the verb is often a weaker one). It can be seen as something one does when he or she does not have enough knowledge to make a concrete decision or statement and is often used with both positive and negative connotations. However, the rest of the sentence solidifies the negativity held within Oedipa's "wonder[ing]." Pynchon writes that the "central truth" is "somehow each time too bright for [Oedipa's] memory to hold." Since bright can be used to describe intelligence, a concept being "too bright" for someone means that he or she does not have the intellectual capacity to understand it; thereby, in choosing the term "bright" for this analogy, Oedipa's is degraded. This turns "wonder[ing]" into blame; the truth is out there, but Oedipa is not capable of obtaining it because of her memory, so it is her fault. However, in the case of a person with epilepsy, it is not his fault that he cannot remember what occurs during those seizures or, oftentimes, that he is having seizures in the first place. No matter what, the lack of consciousness and retention during and after a seizure is not due to the fact that what happens during the seizure is "too bright for [one's] memory to hold." With that said, if Oedipa is being analogized to someone with epilepsy, that means her seizure-like experiences are out of her control; there are other factors that cause Oedipa to have experiences like this. For example, since Pynchon dictates how Oedipa is characterized, he is directly causing her to have these "seizures," so the blame would be on him, not Oedipa. Yet, the blame is still projected on Oedipa – the key word here being projected because it is being put on her, like a projection is put on a screen, and projections are fake, just like the blame in this scenario – which is a demonstration of guilt-tripping, a tactic used by abusers to maintain control over their victims. In addition, if this judgment of Oedipa's memory is stemming from herself (i.e., it is part of her internal thoughts),

it further shows Oedipa's low self-esteem because she believes her memory is incapable of helping her access the truth and that things out of her control are her own fault, caused by repeatedly being guilt-tripped. Whether this blame is stemming from Pynchon and/or the narrator or Oedipa, it serves to keep Oedipa's self-esteem low and continue the cycle of emotional abuse through another guilt trip.

The other meaning of "bright," in the light sense, is also important to consider here. Going back to the spectator/projectionist analogy, if a projection on a screen is too bright, those in the audience will not be able to view the information communicated by the projections, as the lack of light balance between the screen and the projector will distort the image of the projection. Furthermore, because of the sensitivity of human eyes to certain levels of light, being exposed to that bright of a projection could leave viewers blind, either temporarily (similarly to when a camera flash goes off and it takes one's eyes time to rid themselves of the flash's residue) or permanently (like staring directly into the sun for a long period of time). So, a projection being "too bright" can leave viewers blind both to communication and to the physical act of seeing.

This relates back to Oedipa because of her name. Oedipa stems from Sophocles' play from ancient Grecian times entitled *Oedipus Rex*. In it, the titular character (Oedipus) is born to the King and Queen of Thebes engrossed in a terrible fate: he will one day kill his father and take his mother as his lover. When the king and queen order their son to be killed, he is saved and therefore released back into the world to live his life. That being said, Oedipus lives unaware of his fate (i.e., he is blind to it), which causes it to come true. To emphasize the concept of blindness even further, at the end of the play, Oedipus gouges his own eyes out in horror after finding out he has killed his father and had sex with his mother, turning his figurative blindness into literal blindness. This connection to Oedipus establishes Oedipa's blindness as well. While

she is not physically blind, she is blind to her fate like Oedipus because, with the blurry film in the projectionist/spectator analogy, she cannot see what the plan is for her, no matter whose plan that may be (e.g., Pynchon, Pierce, etc.).

Also, she is blind to the "central truth" within the seizure analogy. There are many meanings behind "central truth," with the most literal one being the truth about the Tristero, but another "central truth" that Oedipa is blind to is the emotional abuse she is experiencing. Later in the novel, Oedipa has moments recognizing the possibility of a bigger power controlling her. Yet, these instances where she "[gives] herself up to a fatalism rare for her" or considers that "a plot has been mounted against her" are just that – moments – as she does not act on these thoughts and, immediately after they occur, her thoughts are redirected (100, 141). If the moments lasted longer, Oedipa would be able to piece together what is happening to her, so these moments of realization are kept short by while the moments of her being under the powers of other forces are kept longer in order to normalize this treatment of her. This proves to be successful in as, once the paragraph is redirected, Oedipa completely forgets the train of thought she was on and it takes her 41 pages to recover it. Therefore, Oedipa "recognizes [a signal]" that something is off – just as a person with epilepsy can recognize that he is about to have a seizure – but cannot recall anything after that recognition, just as it is "never what is revealed during the attack that [the person with epilepsy] remembers," which prevents her from seeing how she is being mistreated, just as the "too bright" projection prevents a spectator from seeing what is happening onscreen.

As a result of being blind to the emotional abuse she is experiencing, Oedipa begins to feel the hopelessness that many victims of abusive relationships do under their circumstances. After equating her with a person with epilepsy, the novel continues, "[I]t came to her that she would never know how many times such a seizure may already have visited, or how to grasp it should it

visit again…She glanced down the corridor of Cohen's rooms in the rain and saw, for the very first time, how far it might be possible to get lost in this" (76). Oedipa is aware that there are moments she is missing – insights that are escaping her – but she does not know where to go from there, which leads her to feel lost. Unlike before, where Oedipa sees the circuit-like city of San Narciso and equates it to a map, or proposes to project her own world in which she would be the creator of the map, or even takes the initiative to "give [the elements of Pierce's will] order" and "create constellations" (again, creating a map), her drive for action disappears (72). Her blindness overcomes her; instead of seeing a way out or possibilities to prevent those insights from escaping her, which are all hopeful ways of thinking, she sees "how far it might be possible to get lost in this," demonstrating her loss of initiative to change her circumstances because she cannot maintain her knowledge of what is going on.

Along with her initiative to change her circumstances, Oedipa also begins to lose herself as a result of the abusive environment she is enveloped in. After she goes through a fever dream sequence trying to track down the Tristero, the narration states:

> She busrode and walked on into the lightening morning, giving herself up to a fatalism rare for her. Where was the Oedipa who'd driven so bravely up here from San Narciso? That optimistic baby had come on so like the private eye in any long-ago radio drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from hidebound cops' rules, to solve any great mystery. (100)

The diction within this narration is key. Oedipa "giving herself up to a fatalism rare for her" further emphasizes her feelings of hopelessness while also portraying her loss of self, both of which stem from her perception that she cannot control her life. This is the first time that her blindness to how she is being controlled specifically dissipates (somewhat) as she realizes that

there is some higher power predetermining where her life is going instead of her. Whether the readers identify this higher power to be Pynchon, the narrator, and/or Pierce, it does not matter; what matters is the fact that Oedipa is being controlled. Yet, the fact that it is "rare for her" implies not only that she not concluded this before, but also that it is highly unlikely for her to see it in her life again, aligning with her hopeless feelings towards her seizure-like insights. Additionally, "giving herself up" shows that Oedipa is so hopeless that she feels that trying to fight whatever power is dictating her is no longer worth it; she is surrendering not only control of her life, but also her entire self, including her identity, which is only confirmed and mocked by the question, "Where was the Oedipa who'd driven so bravely up here from San Narciso?"

Just like earlier in the novel, this question is asked through free indirect discourse (as the sentence that follows it); that being said, once again, Oedipa's voice is merged with the narrator's, which makes it difficult to tell who is exactly speaking here. Either way, the question and the additional narration serve to show how much Oedipa changes throughout the novel not just because of her obsession with figuring out the components of Pierce's will (especially the Tristero), but also because of the treatment she is under emotionally. Bravery is associated with qualities like motivation, initiative, and confidence. Oedipa is motivated to find out the truth about the Tristero, which is shown through the initiative she takes to talk to different people, like sneaking into Yoyodyne's offices and faking her way through a conversation with Stanley Kotecs in order to get information about being a sensitive (67). She also demonstrates confidence by talking about projecting a world (her moment of empowerment) and during the conversation with Kotecs, as it takes confidence to portray that one knows what she is talking about when one actually does not know what she is talking about. Therefore, she is brave. But, by asking, "Where was the Oedipa who'd driven so bravely up here from San Narciso?" this bravery is

gone, which is not only a result of hitting roadblocks on her quest to uncover Tristero. Her confidence was never strong from the beginning and dwindles even further once she experiences repetitive put-downs. Her motivation and initiative both fade once hopelessness starts to set it because guilt and low self-esteem are engrained in her mind. So, the mistreatment she is victim to strips her of her bravery, thereby taking a piece of herself with it, portraying another reality of being emotionally abused.

Following the demonstration of her loss of self, Oedipa is enveloped further in emotional abuse by the free indirect discourse putting her down, which first calls her an "optimistic baby." While being optimistic is a positive quality, using the word "baby" after it is belittling; Oedipa's optimism is naïve, an attitude that would be adopted by someone who has not been in the world long enough to experience it. Furthermore, since babies cannot care for themselves, saying that Oedipa is a baby implies that she cannot care for herself; she is weak, helpless, and powerless, in need of someone to help her survive because her twenty-eight-year-old self is incapable of handling her life independently (even though she has made it this far). This humiliation continues with the comparison of Oedipa to a "private eye in any long-ago radio drama." Detectives in radio dramas are fake; they are not actually detectives, but actors pretending to be detectives for entertainment purposes. While Oedipa is by no means a professional detective, she does do a lot of detective-like work to uncover the Tristero, so through this comparison, all the work Oedipa does is discredited. Just as earlier in the novel, whether the humiliation and put downs are coming from an external source (Pynchon and/or the narrator), an internal source (Oedipa herself), or both, they serve to further establish the cycle of emotional abuse through repetition. This is not the first time Oedipa experiences a put-down, nor is it the first time where her thoughts are mixed in with the narration during a put-down; therefore, both Oedipa being put

down and her thinking like those who are putting her down are normalized because their frequent reoccurrences establish a routine. Normalization makes unhealthy and detrimental behavior seem like it is the status quo, which then allows the emotionally abusive behaviors to repeat themselves again and again in a never-ending, cyclical manner.

Because of the cycle of abuse having no end in sight, Oedipa's blindness strengthens in conjunction with her hopelessness, leading to the blame for her circumstances to officially fall on her shoulders. Once she begins to disengage with investigating the Tristero, Oedipa goes back to The Scope where she encounters Mike Fallopian, who she met very early on in her journey of executing Pierce's will. He asks her, "'Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody's putting you on?'" (138). In response, the novel continues, "It had occurred to her. But like the thought that someday she would have to die, Oedipa had been steadfastly refusing to look at that possibility directly, or in any but the most accidental of lights" (138). Because of all the other factors in play – hopelessness, helplessness, loss of self, and even self-deprecation – Oedipa is no longer motivated to seek out the truth or gain insight, leading her to blatant denial of what is true; just like she will face death, there *is* somebody putting her on. For example, Pynchon is putting her on by writing the emotionally abusive cycle that gives her power only for it to be taken away through demeaning and limitations placed on her, usually intellectually. Additionally, in the context of the novel, Pierce puts Oedipa on through the twists and turns he lays out for her in the execution of his will. Either way the readers choose to interpret it, Oedipa is clearly not in control of what is happening in her life, which mirrors the control the abuser takes over his victim's life. However, because Oedipa is intentionally blinding herself to the possibility that there is a bigger power in charge of her, it allows whatever power is treating her this way to not only continue doing so, as many victims of abusive relationships do not leave their partners

because they refuse to believe in their partners' abusive personality traits; they only see the good. Furthermore, it allows the force in control to place all of the blame for his actions on her. If she is refusing to accept the truth, then it is her own fault for not changing the circumstances, not the abuser's fault for disrespecting and demeaning her in the first place and turning this into routine so that it is hard for Oedipa to believe that his behavior is not right.

While being subject to victim-blaming is an unfortunate and inhumane consequence of Oedipa's blindness (whether it was brought on by herself or not) to the abuse she is facing, there is one that is even more severe. If she continues to be blind, she will never be able to escape this cycle of abuse. As Oedipa attempts to make sense of the Tristero and her journey towards the novel's end, Pynchon writes, "Becoming conscious of the hard, strung presence she stood on – knowing as if maps had been flashed for her on the sky how these tracks ran on into others, others, knowing they laced, deepened, authenticated the great night around her. If only she'd looked" (148). Here, Oedipa momentarily has a sense of clarity, similar to the ones mentioned when she is analogized to someone with epilepsy; she is "conscious" and "know[s]" (this word is even repeated twice, emphasizing her absorption of knowledge), which is the most attribution she has gotten with knowledge in the entire novel. Additionally, the projectionist/spectator analogy is tied in once again, as "maps [are] flashed for her on the sky," just as they would be in a planetarium, providing Oedipa with the sense of direction she lost when she began to lose herself. Yet, as also discussed with this analogy, Oedipa is not projecting her own map (i.e., "a world") for herself; the maps are "flashed for her," both keeping her inside of the world already established for her and getting a final dig in on how foolish the idea of Oedipa projecting her own world would be.

And, just as Oedipa's moments of insight lasted temporarily before (hence the seizure analogy), this final spark of clarity follows the same pattern, showing the cyclical nature of Oedipa's treatment once again. Yes, Oedipa is put down by others assuming that she is incapable of establishing her own world, but the last sentence of the quote affirms their grasp at power: "If only she'd looked." First, "if" is a conditional word, portraying that there are consequences – positive ones, considering that the sentence before mentions knowledge, awareness/consciousness, and authentication – waiting for Oedipa, but the only way for her to receive these consequences is for her to complete the action. That being said, "if" leaves so much to chance; it could happen, it could not happen. Either way, the use of the word here puts the decision on Oedipa (also accentuated with "she'd") despite the fact that she is not in control of her every move. This is something readers are extremely familiar with at this point because of the previously established cycle of emotional abuse. "Only" emphasizes a sense of urgency and importance – everything depends on this one specific action being carried out – and serves to belittle Oedipa as well, stating that the task of her looking is a small one that should be carried out with ease. However, "she'd looked," which expands to "she had looked," demonstrates that Oedipa's chance at sight is already past her. Not only is "looked" in the past tense, but passive voice is intentionally used ("had looked") to call attention to Oedipa's opportunity being gone; if she had looked *earlier* – perhaps when she was "steadfastly refusing to look at [certain] possibilit[ies]" (138) – then she would not be where she has now ended up. By her blindness being emphasized here, the reader sees how that lack of insight keeps her exactly where she is: lost, hopeless, lacking answers, and trapped inside a world and a self that abuses her emotionally.

At the novel's end, Oedipa is explicitly trapped under the cycle of emotional abuse, as she accepts her role as a spectator in her life. The final scene states, "Oedipa sat alone, towards the

back of the room, looking at the napes of necks, trying to guess which one was her target, her enemy, perhaps her proof. An assistant closed the heavy door on the lobby windows and the sun. She heard a lock snap shut; the sound echoed a moment…The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49" (152). While Oedipa sitting in the back of the room and "looking" seems like an improvement from her attempt to watch a blurry movie in the novel's beginning, she is "trying to guess," so she does not know exactly what she is looking for, which is the same as watching a movie and not knowing exactly what is on the screen. Then, the closed door shuts out the light provided by the windows and the sun; light is associated with enlightenment, which then can lead to power, so without light in the room, Oedipa's sight is once again cut off. Additionally, the door is locked, keeping Oedipa exactly where she is, paralleling how her victimhood is maintained by the repetitive mistreatment she receives. And, finally, while the auctioneer prepares to communicate by "clear[ing] his throat," Oedipa "await[s] the crying of lot 49," placing her back in the passive role of an audience member as he takes on the active role of facilitating the auction; her "settl[ing] back" only stresses her taking a back seat to those in power (here, the auctioneer, but on a larger scale, Pynchon, the narrator, Pierce, etc.) and accepting that her powerlessness is inevitable, as settling implies agreeing to a circumstance despite one's negative feelings against it. This acceptance gives up any power she had left to fight what is happening to her and, with absolutely no power, motivation, or positivity left, all Oedipa can do is succumb to the emotional abuse as the novel – and any hope for a different ending for Oedipa – comes to a close.

Throughout *The Crying of Lot 49,* projections keep protagonist Oedipa Maas trapped in degradation and blindness, which then contribute to her powerlessness. From the novel's beginning, she is equated to a spectator who cannot see the film due to it being "out of focus,"

resembling her lack of insight regarding her own plot line (i.e., her life) as those in power choose to hold knowledge back from her. Then, every time she does gain power, whether it be in the form of knowledge/insight from a projection of a map or by taking on the planetarium-style projecting herself, it is immediately stripped from her and she is subsequently knocked down even further than where she began. As the novel progresses, so does the abuse, since Oedipa is blind to how she is being mistreated. This blindness allows for the projection of blame upon her, even though she is not the one causing the lack of knowledge she is being blamed for. Additionally, because she is experiencing constant put-downs from external sources, she begins to put herself down, sinking her further into the abusive cycle. This leads to Oedipa facing severe personal losses – loss of self-esteem, loss of motivation/initiative, and the loss of herself – which makes room for her blindness to expand to the point where the only option she can see is giving in to the powerlessness she faces. At this point, the novel ends, leaving Oedipa in the same place she began and preventing her escape from the treatment she has fallen victim to.

It may not seem like this matters considering that Oedipa is a fictional character and *The Crying of Lot 49* is a fictional text. However, the cycle Oedipa becomes trapped in and the emotionally abusive treatment she faces is anything but fiction. By recognizing the warning signs and examples of emotional abuse in this fictional context, we can then begin recognizing emotional abuse in real life, whether it be in our own lives or the lives of those we love. It may be too late to save Oedipa – her fate was set in ink fifty-three years ago – but it may not be too late to help someone else, someone in our reality, from facing the internal trauma of emotional abuse. We can break the cycle, but first, we need to be able to see it.

Works Cited

Pynchon, T. *The Crying of Lot 49*. J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1966.